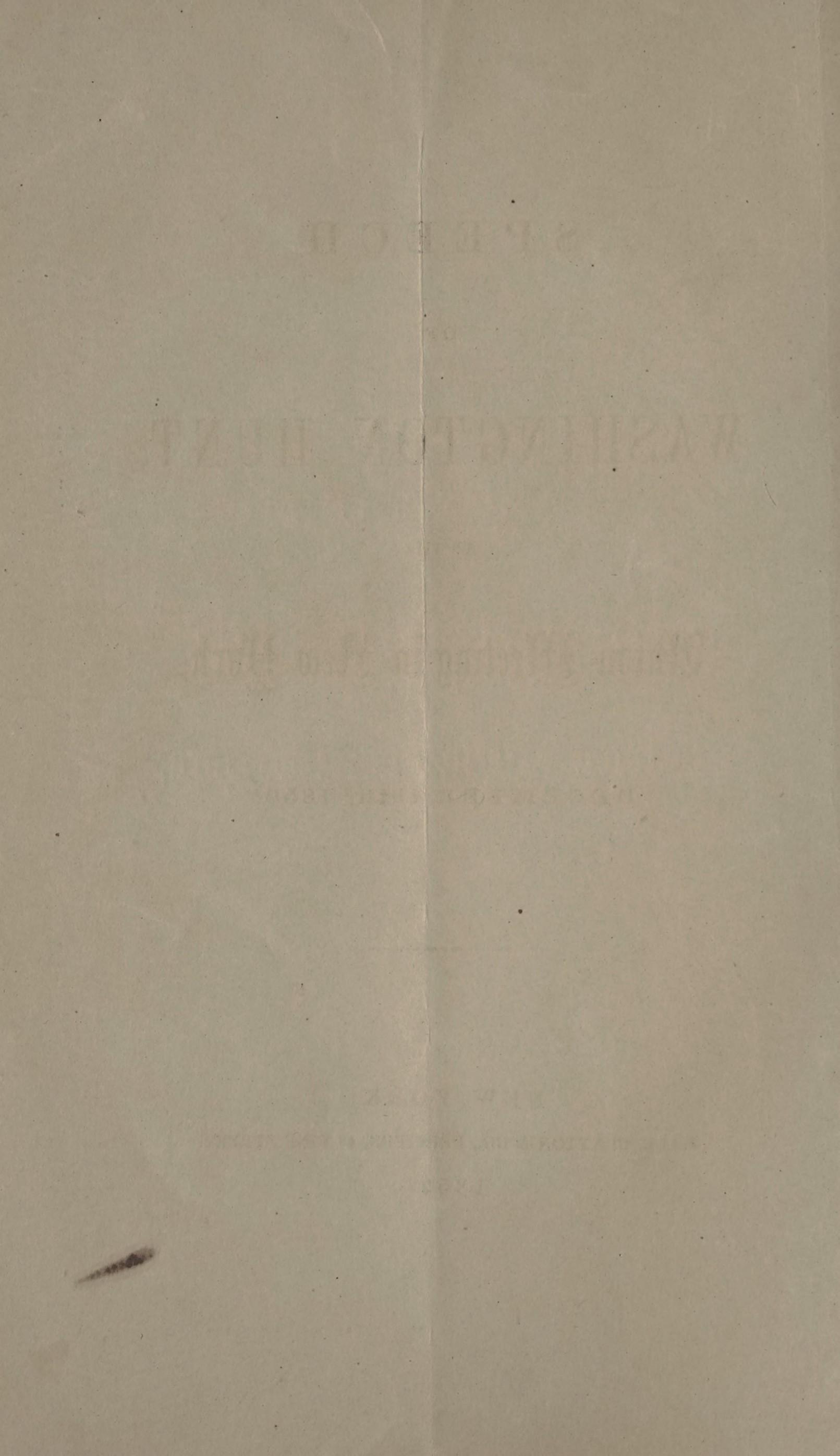


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S P E E C H
O F
W A S H I N G T O N H U N T,
A T T H E
Union Meeting in New York,

D E C E M B E R 19th, 1859.



S P E E C H
O F
WASHINGTON HUNT,

AT THE
Union Meeting in New York,

DECEMBER 19th, 1859.

NEW YORK:

HALL, CLAYTON & CO., PRINTERS, 46 PINE STREET.

1859.

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WILLIAM C. RIVES
APRIL, 1940

GOVERNOR HUNT'S SPEECH

AT THE

Union Meeting in New York.

AN immense meeting of the citizens of New York, seeking the restoration of friendly sentiments between the North and the South, assembled at the Academy of Music on the 19th of December, 1859.

The Hon. WASHINGTON HUNT, attending on the invitation of the Committee, was introduced to the meeting by the Mayor of the City, and received with every mark of respect.

He addressed the assemblage as follows:

MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOW-CITIZENS—In obedience to your summons I have come from the interior of our State, and appear before you to-night to mingle my voice with yours in behalf of American Union and Nationality. A profound sense of duty brings me here to unite with you in new vows of fidelity to the institutions we received from Washington and Adams, and Jefferson and Hamilton. I come to invoke that spirit of unity and brotherhood which carried our fathers through the dark and trying scenes of the Revolution, and which subsequently enabled them to perfect and establish the most perfect system of federal union and government ever devised by the wisdom of man. Let us unite our efforts for the rescue of our country from impending dangers, and endeavor once more to inspire those sentiments of mutual confidence and good-will, without which, even if union were possible, it were hardly worth preserving. We

have reached a crisis in our affairs which demands the sober reflection of every true patriot, and which allows no man to fold his arms in silent indifference, as an unconcerned observer of passing events. The time has come, when every American citizen must declare whether he intends to "keep step to the music of the Union," or lend his voice to swell the dismal chorus of sectional discord and defiance. The time has come for New York to speak and proclaim, in no ambiguous phrase, but in words of energy which cannot be mistaken, that whatever others may do, she stands and will forever stand by that sacred compact which makes us one country and one people; that come what may, she will be found faithful to its obligations, loyal to its compromises, and true to its spirit, and that she will resist to the last extremity all fratricidal efforts, under whatsoever guise or from whatsoever quarter they may proceed, to alienate the people of the two great sections of our country, or to weaken the ties of friendship which bind them together in one common destiny.

Mr. President, you have rendered a fitting and earnest tribute to the value of that Union, and I feel that it is unnecessary for me to dwell upon the inspiring theme, especially in this presence, before an audience embracing so large a share of the intelligence and patriotism of the first commercial emporium of the American continent. Under the benignant sway of the Federal Constitution, our advances in strength, prosperity, and power, and in all that constitutes the true greatness and felicity of nations, are without a parallel in the annals of mankind. But seventy years have passed away, a period within the memory of living men, since the formation of our compact of union. Compare the situation of the infant Republic with our present national condition. How wonderful the contrast! Instead of the original thirteen feeble and exhausted, behold thirty-four powerful, prosperous States, united by the bonds of a common nationality. Instead of a narrow belt along the

seaboard, we exhibit a broad continental republic, reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico. We have grown from a population of four millions to thirty millions of people, enjoying constitutional liberty and security under the protecting ægis of the national power. New agencies of intercourse have overleaped the most formidable barriers, and brought the remotest parts near together. The national wealth and power of production have increased to an extent which appears fabulous. The expansion of our commerce has excited the wonder, I had almost said the envy, of the world. Already have we taken our place among the foremost nations of the earth, and before the lapse of another century, unless the ties of union shall be dissevered, the United States of America will have become the most powerful empire on the globe. Our example will animate and sustain, perhaps our power will protect the friends of free government in other lands.

Why are all these mighty interests, these inestimable blessings, these precious hopes to be put at hazard? Shall the noblest legacy ever bestowed upon mankind be thrown away, and "counted nothing worth," because the domestic institutions of the States are diversified and cannot be moulded into uniformity—or in other words, because the South continues to hold the negro subordinate, and as they held him at the formation of the Union? When divested of the trappings of sophistry and the exaggerations of fanaticism, the practical question which our people must consider is—whether the North and South are to be enemies or friends? What are to be the future relations between these two great sections? Is it peace or war? Shall they continue to move onward together as brethren under a common flag, mutually aiding and co-operating in the administration of one common government,—or are they to be separated into distinct and hostile political systems, each to pursue its own destiny independent of the other?

Union means something more than the mere phraseology of a political compact. It vitally includes the idea of friendship and mutual kindness, to be manifested not by formal professions, but by unmistakable acts of kindness and respect. There can be no real or permanent union between States hostile in feeling and incessantly taught to regard each other with hatred and aversion. We have no reason to look for such a phenomenon, without a complete transformation of human nature and human passions. Whether the North and the South are to remain one country, or be rent asunder and formed into separate confederacies, is a question in comparison with which the schemes of politicians and the ordinary conflicts of parties sink into utter insignificance.

I will not attempt to portray the calamities of disunion, the universal bankruptcy and ruin, the scenes of anarchy and blood, the sundering of kindred ties and cherished attachments, and that direful and interminable train of consequences, which no human wisdom can foresee. Who can say that in such an event, the States of the North and West would remain united? or that New York and New England could adjust the conditions of confederated power? or even, that New York and Philadelphia would consent to one common government? It would be far easier to excite jealousies between the parts than to reunite them, and political agitators would not then be wanting to sow the seeds of jealousy and conflict. Would not these disunited members soon relapse into the incoherent, discordant condition of the fragmentary States of South America, and become the sport of military ambition, to sink at last into the arms of despotic power?

The agitators of the slavery question ought to remember, that African slavery was introduced in the Southern States long before the Revolution; that the present generation inherited it from their ancestors, and are not responsible for its existence, and that they now have a colored population

of four millions, which they must be permitted to deal with according to their own views of interest and duty. The opinions of Washington and Jefferson are sometimes introduced to sanction the present system of slavery agitation. It is true that they both deplored the existence of slavery, and regarded it as an evil. But even then, when the slave population was less than one-sixth of its present number, they perceived that the system was too pervading and formidable for their powers, and they brought forward no definite measures for its eradication. Least of all, did they advise or encourage the people of the free States to form themselves into anti-slavery combinations to sit in judgment upon their sister communities, and disturb the public tranquillity by a constant outpouring of sectional animosity. On the contrary, their last and most emphatic warnings to their countrymen were intended to arouse them to the danger of sectional jealousies and dissensions. Washington signed the first fugitive slave law. Jefferson purchased Louisiana, and both sanctioned laws admitting slave States into the Union.

Let us briefly consider the difficulties that were encountered in the adjustment of our federal compact, and then contemplate the wise statesmanship and generous patriotism by which they were surmounted. Then, as now, the States had their peculiar institutions and prejudices. They were widely dissimilar in climate and position, in their productions, their social organization and domestic policy. There were conflicting interests and opinions which could be reconciled only by the exercise of the noble magnanimity and true love of country, which shone forth so conspicuous in that bright era of public virtue and patriotic zeal. After the Convention of 1787 had completed its labors, under the auspices of the Father of his Country, it devolved upon him, as President of the body, to communicate the Constitution to the Congress of the old Confederation. After adverting to the difficulties produced "by a difference among the sev-

eral States as to their situation, extent, habits, and particular interests," he holds the following language: "The Constitution which we now present is the result of a spirit of amity, and of that mutual deference and concession which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable." Yes, Mr. President, the spirit of amity perfected the glorious fabric; the spirit of amity must be invoked to sustain and preserve it.

One of the highest objects of the compact then made, was to blend conflicting interests, and to bind the States together by the ties of mutual benefit and affection. It was intended to combine their strength for the common welfare and protection, and insure for all the blessings of free intercourse and commerce on a firm foundation of perpetual friendship and concord. It was wisely decided by the patriots of that day, that the negro should not stand in the way of union. Then, as now, it was apparent that the very diversities and differences to which I have adverted, increased the necessity for a national compact which should insure domestic tranquillity, and unite the efforts of the States and the people for the attainment of those common objects which require the exercise of concentrated, national power. Experience has demonstrated that the varied forms of industry and production contribute to the general strength, and largely augment the benefits resulting from commercial interchange between the different sections of the country. The notion that the States of the North and South cannot coexist side by side as friends and neighbors, and act together harmoniously in one national system, by reason of the dissimilarity of their domestic institutions, and that partisan warfare between them is either necessary or justifiable until slavery shall have been abolished in one section or legalized in the other, is an absurd and mischievous fallacy, having no basis of fact or sound argument for its support. Our whole history rejects the proposition, and common sense refutes it; for I emphatically deny, that there is any

necessary antagonism between African slave labor in the tropical South and free labor in the temperate North.

It is no more necessary now than in times past, that any State should surrender the control of its internal affairs, or that either section should abandon its own to adopt the system or the opinions of the other. It is the unquestionable right of every State to regulate its own domestic concerns, without intervention from other parts of the country.

The recent invasion of Virginia by a band of conspirators, for the avowed purpose of arming the slaves and organizing a servile insurrection, has excited emotions of abhorrence in every mind not incurably distempered by sectional fanaticism. Ought it to surprise us, that an attempt so nefarious, so diabolical, should arouse feelings of intense indignation among the Southern people, or that they should look with just solicitude for an expression of the sentiments of the North, in regard to this treasonable assault upon their peace and security? Of course, they have not failed to observe, that for some years past the discussion of negro slavery has been the leading business of a large number of presses, lecturers, politicians and preachers in the North, and that the slave States and slaveholders have been made the standing theme of invective and assault. The slavery question has been made to swallow up every other topic of public interest in the minds of many benevolent but misguided persons, whose sympathies are most powerfully and singularly excited by those distant evils, real or imaginary, which lie entirely beyond their control.

In a healthful state of public sentiment, the bloody scenes at Harper's Ferry, and the attempt to arm a servile population with thousands of murderous spears to be bathed in the blood of men, women, and children of our own race and lineage, would have produced but one universal thrill of horror. Yet there are men among us, whose minds are so diseased by sectional prejudice, that they openly express sympathy with John Brown and his schemes of murder and

insurrection. I regret to add, that there are presses in the land which, while feebly expressing a disapproval of his acts, yet do not so much condemn the atrocity of his intentions, as the inadequacy of his plans and the chimerical nature of the undertaking. They appear to be far more indignant with Virginia for executing her laws, than with him for violating them. Apparently forgetting that he entered a sister State in the garb of a peaceful settler professing friendly purposes; that for months his life was a fraud and a false pretence, intended to lull his victims into a fatal security; that while indulging these false professions, he was secretly preparing to imbrue his hands in the blood of the innocent, and enact barbarities at which humanity shudders, they exhibit him to the public as a victim to what they strangely call the aggressive spirit of slavery. It is time to proclaim in the most emphatic manner, that the great body of our citizens have no share in these detestable sentiments, but on the contrary regard them with alarm and horror, as subversive of law, justice, and humanity. They indignantly reprobate every attempt to endanger the peace and security of our Southern brethren. It is the sovereign right and prerogative of Virginia to make and administer her own laws; the people of other States have no lawful concern in the matter. She gave John Brown a fair judicial trial, and the whole country should rejoice, not only that he and his confederates received the punishment so justly due to their crimes, but that his schemes of widespread insurrection and slaughter were so promptly crushed. John Brown was a citizen of our own State, and as far as he could, he dishonored her by his treasonable violation of the rights of Virginia. It is peculiarly fitting, therefore, that the people of New York, of all parties, should make their sentiments distinctly understood, and emphatically declare their abhorrence of his crime and the ungovernable fanaticism in which it originated and by which it has been too long encouraged.

We have not forgotten that New York and Virginia are sister States, and have plighted their mutual faith in the bonds of confederation and union. Who can ever forget that they stood side by side through the stormy scenes of the Revolution, and that Washington, the noblest son of Virginia, in the darkest hour of despondency, defended the soil of New York against the overwhelming force of the invader, and the more dangerous machinations of domestic treason? We might also well remember that Virginia, in a spirit of disinterested patriotism, not surpassed on the brightest pages of history, gave to the Union that vast and imperial domain, which now constitutes the prosperous, free States of the Northwest, and the richest nursery of the commerce and prosperity of New York.

Cherishing these recollections of the past, well may we blush for the decay of national spirit, when we hear the needless insults so frequently aimed at that Commonwealth, for remaining in the social and domestic condition transmitted to her by the generations which have passed away. Survey our past history, and tell me what Virginia has done to us to justify these ebullitions of resentment. Has she ever invaded our territory with spears, or interfered with our internal concerns, or sought to force her institutions upon us?

The free States of the North entered into the federal compact with the slave States of the South, with their eyes open. We knew that they held a large African population in domestic servitude. Yet we chose to unite with them in forming a common government for specified, national objects. After contracting these federal relations and adopting the Constitution as the charter of perpetual amity, is it a friendly proceeding, is it consistent with honor and good faith, to turn upon them and arraign them in language of condemnation and insult, on the question of negro slavery, which belongs wholly to them, and over which we have neither jurisdiction nor control? To me it seems an unwise and ungen-

erous interference with a subject which is none of ours. It is a violation of the comity of States, which can have no useful effect whatever. It aggravates the evils which it would remedy, and produces increased severity by exciting feelings of irritation and insecurity among the only people who have power over the condition of the slave.

Mr. President, in all the sectional collisions which have disturbed the country, my voice has been on the side of moderation. I have never sympathized with factious agitators in the North, nor with disunionists in the South. Always maintaining the just rights of my own section, I have been equally ready to respect the rights and the feelings of the other. When differences have arisen, from whatever cause, I have contended for their adjustment in a friendly spirit, on principles consistent with the rights and the honor of both sections.

It is not my purpose now to review past controversies, nor to discuss their origin or their merits. It would serve no useful purpose. We have all expressed our opinions, and acted an honest part, according to our own sense of patriotic duty. Instead of reviving the disputes which have divided the North and the South, and interrupted harmonious relations, it is much wiser to consider how they may be terminated and banished from our national councils. So far as there was anything practical in the sectional contests which have convulsed the country, they are ended already, and belong to the domain of history. The crisis demands that we should exercise a spirit of patriotic conciliation. It is time that this angry warfare of sections should cease, and that the voice of discord should be rebuked and hushed forever. The present condition of the country calls emphatically for moderation.

In national concerns, no less than the subordinate relations of men, moderation is the highest wisdom. By rejecting its counsels and yielding to the fury of excited passions, most of the free republics, ancient and modern, after a brief

career of prosperity, perished from the earth. The voice of history warns us that the rivalries, jealousies and conflicts of confederated States, have always resulted in the destruction of free government. If my feeble voice could be heard throughout the land, I would plead for moderation, both in the North and in the South. I would earnestly appeal to the people of the Southern States, in the present moment of exasperation, to avoid all extreme and unconstitutional measures, and to reject the counsels of any who would hurry them forward into the vortex of treason and disunion. Let them be assured that there is no occasion for this fearful and fatal alternative. They may still rely on the justice and fidelity and friendship of the great body of their countrymen in the free States. A vast majority of the people of the North, of all parties, are still loyal to the Union and the Constitution, and so far from intending they will resist every effort to invade the institutions and the rights of the slaveholding States. The old feeling of national brotherhood and affection will revive and assert its resistless power, even in the breasts of thousands who have been momentarily misled by the impulses of sectional feeling and excited passions. Our fellow-citizens in the South ought certainly to remember, that whole communities cannot justly be held responsible for the ravings of individual fanatics, and the wild schemes of sectional agitators and conspirators.

At the same time, let us appeal to the men of the North to act a conservative and patriotic part. Will they not arise in their might, and put an end to this detestable and dangerous warfare between the two great sections of the American Union? Every patriot heart must desire the restoration of peace and the revival of mutual confidence and kindness. I contend that negro slavery ought no more now than in 1787, to stand in the way of national unity and concord. As that question was not permitted to defeat the formation of the Union, we should not allow it to mar the

enjoyment of its blessings. We all know that slavery is regarded with different sentiments in the free States and the slave States. It was so from the beginning; but the Constitution has wisely left each State to regulate the subject according to its own will and pleasure. If the people will bear in mind this fundamental truth, and govern themselves accordingly, sectional controversy and excitement must soon disappear. The constant discussion and agitation of the slavery question in the free States, has become an intolerable nuisance. A portion of the Northern press seem to consider it the only subject of human interest. They will not allow us to lose sight of it for a day. In literature, in politics, in religion, they insist that it is the great moral pivot on which everything must turn. A stranger in the land, ignorant of our history, would infer that for the first time we are about to decide whether slavery shall be permitted in this country or not. Of course he would be greatly surprised to learn that New York, New England, and all the free States, abolished slavery many years ago, and that no man has yet proposed to restore it. We decided that it is not good for us, and we will not have it, thus fulfilling our duty, and exhausting our jurisdiction over the subject. That should be the end of the matter, so far at least as we are concerned. For what legitimate purpose, then, is an anti-slavery excitement to be kept alive in the free States? Most of the political agitators of the subject admit, that they have no power or disposition to interfere with slavery in the States where it exists, and many of them even repel the idea that they seek in any way to benefit the colored population. But nevertheless they wage an interminable war of words, proposing nothing for the benefit either of master or slave, but leaving the institution in full vigor, as a perpetual target for political adventurers.

But it is urged, that their real object is to prevent the extension of slavery into free territory. That was once a pending practical question. It is so no longer. Kansas is

free, as many of us maintained that it must be, from causes too powerful to be controlled by the efforts of politicians or propagandists. All the territory affected by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise is free, and must forever remain so. The battle is fought and won, and the troops should be disbanded. There is no territory belonging to the Union in which slavery can be profitably established. Every reflecting man in the South as well as the North sees and admits the fact.

We may be told, that there are slaves in New Mexico, and that the Territorial Legislature has made it legal. But the notion that slavery can be planted there as a permanent system, is too chimerical for serious discussion. It is no more probable than the introduction of the cotton culture into Maine or Nova Scotia. What is New Mexico? It is a remote and inaccessible region of mountain ranges and desert plains, vividly and accurately described as "a howling desolation." It is said that a few unhappy army officers have taken slaves into that forlorn wilderness, as domestic servants to cook their rations. This may be so, but it is well known that there is no agriculture there upon which slave labor could subsist. No Southern planter could be induced to migrate there. The whole American continent cannot afford to be convulsed from year to year, merely to prevent a danger so trifling and so remote. As a matter of fact, the territories have ceased to be the object of sectional contest. Why, then, prolong the strife on a mere abstraction after the controversy has been decided? The North already holds a large preponderance of strength. She can afford to be just and magnanimous. Texas was the last slave State admitted into the Union. Since that event, the whole Pacific coast has been added to the domain of free territory; four free States have been admitted, and Kansas is forthcoming. While the public ear is wearied with incessant railings on the extension, and the aggressions of slavery, these actual results show that in fact, there has been no ex-

tension whatever. Mr. President, the age of the Crusades is past, and the country is entitled to repose. The time has come (if it is ever to come) for terminating these unhappy and needless sectional dissensions. There are great national interests, in which all the States have a common concern, and which the Federal Union was intended to foster and protect. How much more vital and important are those common objects, belonging to all, and necessary for all, than the single point of diversity which has been too long the absorbing source of angry irritation! It should be the effort of every sincere patriot to recall the public mind from these mischievous disputes to the national concerns which affect the welfare of the whole country, and to those sentiments of mutual regard which prevailed in the better days of the Republic. The interruption of friendly feelings between the States of the North and the South is of itself, a great and incalculable evil. It withers and blights the choicest benefits which the Union was intended to secure. It embitters our national councils, obstructs all useful legislation, arrests commercial intercourse, and destroys that feeling of confidence and security which is one of the highest objects of civil society. Our divisions create well-founded alarm for the stability of our republican institutions, and make us a by-word and reproach among the nations. It is a spectacle from which every patriotic heart must recoil with mortification and dismay. It inspires the despots of the earth with fresh hopes, and everywhere chills the aspirations of the friends of constitutional liberty. I trust that good men throughout the land will unite in the work of peace and conciliation, and proclaim their unalterable purpose to resist all further efforts to combine section against section in political strife. It was not intended by the founders of our government, that one portion of the country should rule or subjugate the other. Far different, more noble and exalted were their aims. They sought to frame a constitutional system which should unite the people of all the States into one

family of freemen, to participate harmoniously in the responsibilities of power, to share equally in its blessings, and to unite their efforts to uphold the principles of civil and religious liberty. Such was the government which our fathers made, and may it be our happy destiny to preserve it as it came from their hands.

There are those who maintain, that the Union possesses a strength superior to human vicissitude, and that its stability cannot be endangered by any political contingency. They are disposed to treat with levity and poor attempts at ridicule, all expressions of apprehension and solicitude. They profess to rely on the strength of mountain chains and navigable waters to hold the parts together. I do not under-estimate the power of material interests and commercial ties as a bond of political connection, but these alone are not sufficient. The excited passions, the determined will of States and communities, are not to be controlled by geographical or commercial channels of intercourse. Popular feeling, when deeply aroused, disdains the barriers of physical nature. Neither rivers, nor seas, nor mountain ranges, nor laws of trade or financial interests affecting the public prosperity, have proved sufficient to save republics from dismemberment and destruction. The voluntary affection and loyalty of the people is the only sure basis for a free government. A love of the Union must be cherished in the hearts of the whole American people. We must continue to regard it as the greatest political blessing ever conferred upon mankind. Let us this night send forth a declaration, which shall assure our brethren in the South that the people of the North are ready to put away strife, and lay fresh offerings upon the altar of our common country. I see and feel that the heart of this metropolis glows with patriotic fervor. Its generous pulsations will be felt to the remotest extremities of our vast, continental Republic. Be it proclaimed and understood from this time forth, that New York will never falter in her loyalty to the Union and

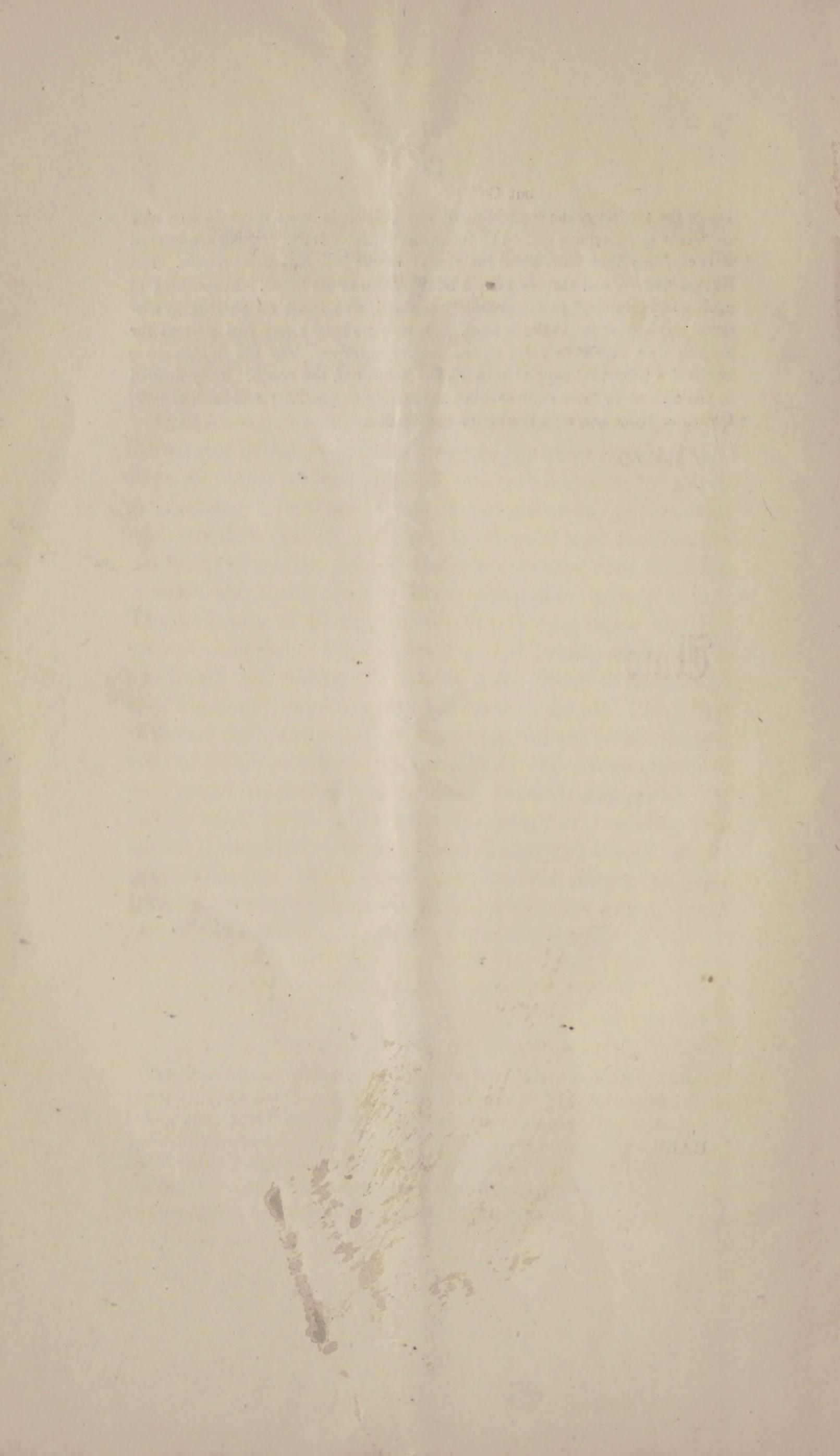
the Constitution; that she still cherishes a proud recollection of the united efforts and common sacrifices by which our national independence was secured, and that she will never cease to foster those sentiments of national brotherhood and affection, which animated the fathers of our country, and which bind us together by the most sacred and indissoluble ties.

In the progress of human events, it has been reserved to the people of this country to decide, by their conduct and example, whether societies of men are capable or not of maintaining a system of free representative government, and whether States, differing in climate and institutions, can be permanently united under a common confederation. A more sacred charge was never committed to any nation. The warnings of history should not be lost upon the free-men of America. Once more I would invoke them all, in the North and South, the East and the West, to be faithful to the mighty interests intrusted to their hands. May they cultivate that broad and generous patriotism, which embraces the whole country in its affections. May they ever look with patriotic disdain on the poor partisan arts which, for selfish ends, would undermine the glorious fabric of our united nationality, but with clear heads and honest hearts ever resist the ruthless and sacrilegious efforts to rend asunder those grand communities, which the great Architect of nations has so graciously joined together.

From the N. Y. Express, December 22.

THE TRIBUNE AND EX-GOVERNOR HUNT.—Mr. Greeley publishes a letter to Governor Hunt, insisting that his votes in Congress in favor of the Wilmot Proviso were inconsistent with his present desire that there may be an end of angry, sectional agitation. It is true that Gov. Hunt voted in common with all the Northern Whigs against the annexation of Texas, and in favor of excluding slavery from the territory acquired from Mexico. It was then a pending question, and it was believed that slavery would naturally go into a large por-

tion of the territory unless prohibited; but California soon came in free, and the whole question was settled by the compromise of 1850. No one condemned more strongly than Gov. Hunt the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. But Kansas is free, and slavery gained no extension of its limits. In speaking of "factious agitators," he referred only to those who insist on prolonging sectional strife after the battle is over. There is no longer any just pretext for keeping up a Northern party on the slavery question. The old Whigs never intended a perpetual conflict between the North and the South. They desired to put an end to these controversies as speedily as possible; and then, as now, Governor Hunt was an advocate of moderation.



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